

public opinion & political behavior

PSCI 3051.001
SPRING 2013
EKELEY SCIENCES E1B50
T/TH 12:30 – 1:45 P.M.

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OFFICE HOURS: W 1-3 P.M.
& BY APPOINTMENT

This class concerns the joy and magic that is the study of public opinion. In many ways, public opinion is the currency of a representative democracy. It is the expression of what people expect, desire, and think of their government. And it is what politicians follow, influence, and are held accountable to. Throughout the course, we will consider the structure and dynamics of public opinion, analyzing both what influences it, as well as how it shapes other aspects of politics and public life. We will begin by thinking about how we measure public opinion and the methodology of public opinion polling. Next, we will consider how the public forms opinions about politics – what people know about politics, how they organize their beliefs, and why it matters. We will then investigate the factors in the political world influence and shape public opinion, including the effects of the media, political rhetoric, and social forces. Finally, we will explore the consequences of public opinion – for citizen participation in politics, for the actions of political leaders, and for representation.

D2L is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at learn.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

- Asher, Herbert. 2012. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 8th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2012. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.
- A set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the course website.

expectations

You are encouraged to be an active participant in class! Please feel free to raise questions at any point during class, including matters of clarification, theoretical points, or topics to address in class discussion. You should also keep in touch by e-mail or by visiting office hours if you have any questions about course expectations or the material covered in class.

You are also expected to maintain proper classroom etiquette. This includes respecting the opinions of others even if you disagree, not talking out of turn, putting away newspapers and crossword puzzles during lecture, turning off cell phones before class, and not disrupting the class if arriving late.

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will be responsible for the following:

PARTICIPATION, SHORT ASSIGNMENTS, AND QUIZZES *(worth 20% of your final grade)*

Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade. We will have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade, and several weeks we will have short quizzes on the readings. We will also have a few short homework assignments that are intended to help you gain the skills needed to complete the research paper for the course.

RESEARCH PAPER *(worth 20% of your final grade)*

The paper assignment for the class involves analyzing survey data to better understand the roots of some aspect of public opinion or political behavior. Paper guidelines will be detailed in a separate handout.

THREE EXAMS *(each worth 20% of your final grade)*

There will be two midterm exams and a final exam.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at honorcode.colorado.edu. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism, citation style, and writing in political science is also posted on the course website. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Council for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).

PSCI 3051: class schedule

introduction to the course

WHY STUDY PUBLIC OPINION?

Tuesday, January 15 – Thursday, January 17

Introduction to the class and the study of public opinion.

- Asher, chapter 1 (read or skim)
- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 1.

measuring public opinion

HOW PEOPLE ANSWER SURVEY QUESTIONS

Tuesday, January 22 – Thursday, January 24

The psychology of how people answer survey questions, how to design questionnaires to best capture attitudes.

- Asher, chapters 2 and 3.

SAMPLING AND SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Tuesday, January 29 – Thursday, January 31

How should we choose a survey sample? How can a survey of 1000 people tell us about public preferences?

- Asher, chapters 4 and 5.

POLLING IN PRACTICE

Tuesday, February 5 – Thursday, February 7

Assessing the quality of polls in campaign seasons, interpreting survey results.

- Asher, chapters 7 and 8

EVALUATING SURVEYS

Tuesday, February 12

How to analyze public opinion through survey responses

Thursday, February 14: Exam 1

the character of public opinion

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Tuesday, February 19 – Thursday, February 21

How much do people know about politics? How organized and coherent are their beliefs?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 8 and chapter 5.
- Schudson, Michael. 2000. "America's Ignorant Voters." *The Wilson Quarterly* 24(2):16-23.

ATTITUDE STABILITY AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

Tuesday, February 26 – Thursday, February 28

The stability and instability of political opinions, changes in attitudes over time

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 4.
- Hetherington, Marc. 2012. "Partisanship and Polarization." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

what influences public opinion?

WHERE DO ATTITUDES COME FROM?

Tuesday, March 5 – Wednesday, March 7

How values, self-interest, personality, and socialization all shape political perspectives.

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 6 and chapter 2.

GROUP PRESSURES, POLITICAL TALK, AND MEDIA INFLUENCE

Tuesday, March 12 – Thursday, March 14

The influence of social groups, political talk, and the media on how we understand politics.

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 3.
- Burns, Nancy, and Donald Kinder. 2012. "Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

POLITICAL RHETORIC AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

Tuesday, March 19

The consequences of elite rhetoric and campaigns on how people see politics.

- Sides, John, and Jake Haselswerdt. 2012. "Campaigns and Elections." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Thursday, March 21: Exam 2

Tuesday, March 26 – Thursday, March 28: Spring break – class does not meet.

expressions of public opinion

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL, CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL, AND TRUST

Tuesday, April 2 – Thursday, April 4

Why do people trust or mistrust government? And does it matter if they trust their leaders?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 11.
- Fenno, Richard E. 1975. "If, as Ralph Nader Says, Congress Is 'the Broken Branch,' How Come We Love our Congressmen So Much?" In Norman J. Ornstein, ed., *Congress in Change: Evolution and Reform*. New York: Praeger.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Tuesday, April 9 – Thursday, April 11

Why do people try to limit the rights of others?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapters 9 and 10.

consequences of public opinion

VOTER TURNOUT

Tuesday, April 16 – Thursday, April 18

Why do people participate in elections? And why do some avoid politics?

- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan. Chapter 2.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Tuesday, April 23 – Thursday, April 25

Explaining participation in campaigns as well as civic life

- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2012. *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.

REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

Tuesday, April 30 – Thursday, May 2

To what degree does public opinion influence policy outcomes?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 12.

Tuesday, May 7: Final exam (1:30 - 4 p.m.)